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NEWS

May Day: A Questionable Tradition?

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Washington College's annual May Day celebration dates back many years, and is one of the College's more bizarre traditions. The College does not endorse it, a campus club or interest group does not run it, and no outside organizations take credit for its inception or continuation over the years. In spite of all this, it continues uninhibited every May 1.

The celebration takes place over two nights, occurring at midnight before May 1, and the following midnight before May 2. The May Day festivities that take place today involve students running nude around the campus green. Like many traditions, it has evolved over the years.

Director of Public Safety Jerry Roderick has been involved with Public Safety for 33 years, and was also a part of the Chestertown Police Department before that. In the past, he said, May Day would take place during the daytime as well as at night. People would play golf and volleyball in broad daylight, completely naked. He recalled that a liquor store used to give a free case of beer to the first male and female couple that came in naked.

The tradition brings students to the George statue every May 1.

Roderick said, "Back in the '70s, your biggest threat was and has always been sexual assault." Somebody coming on campus with a camera and snapping shots of people, "was not a concern back then."

Roderick made it clear that the College neither endorses nor condones the celebration.

Vice President of Student Affairs Xavier Cole made similar statements regarding May Day festivities. He said, "The things I'm most concerned about are the student safety aspects."

Both Cole and Roderick said that they want to educate students on the potential dangers of May Day. Cole said, "We care about students, their learning environment, and their safety," but, "regardless of my thoughts, [participation] is a student's decision."

The two most consistent concerns for the College are alcohol consumption and sexual assault. Alcohol impairs the judgment of its consumer, and when it is combined with naked college students, events can get out of control. Roderick said that in his multiple years of working for the College, he has seen intoxicated individuals get injured as a result of their impaired judgment. He also said that alcohol results in sexual harassment.

Student Government Association President Taylor Frey weighed in on the issues as well. Recently, the SGA sent out a survey asking the students what they think about May Day, and the results should be out next week.

Frey said that he knows that May Day is a tradition. "Two of the biggest thing I'm always thinking about is 'how can I help preserve our traditions,' but also, 'how can I ensure safety for all of our students'," he said.

While the College does not condone it, it does hope that the tradition can evolve in such a way to meet the changing needs and times of not only the students but the people of Chestertown.